Published on the Internet, March, 2014, this article was written in 1969 and rewritten in 2014. The pdf version was placed on Internet Archive in 2021.

A Tribute to Bishop Mor Gregorius Bulus Behnam (1914-1969)

By Matti Moosa

The first time I set my eyes on the young monk, Sarkis Behnam, later to be known as Bishop Gregorius Bulus Behnam, was on August 15, 1935 at the ancient Monastery of St. Matthew near Mosul, Iraq. On that day, Sarkis and three other students of the monastery's seminary were ordained as monks. Many dignitaries from Mosul and the neighboring villages went up to the monastery to attend the ordination ceremony. I was only eleven years old when my father took me along with him to witness the ceremony. I vividly remember young Sarkis with the other three companions prostrating themselves outside the sanctuary of the ancient church of the monastery located not far from the Beth Qadishe (Mausoleum of Saints), where the celebrated Bar Hebraeus was buried. At the end of the celebration of the Eucharist, Dionysius Yuhanna Mansurati, metropolitan of the monastery, assisted by Athanasius Tuma Qasir, metropolitan of Mosul, vested Sarkis and his companions with the monastic habit, and changed Sarkis' name into Bulus. When the service of ordination ended, those present began congratulating the newly ordained monks for assuming the monastic habit. As I look back on that ceremony, I can only remember the faces of these ordained monks, having had no personal contact with them, especially Bulus. The opportunity of meeting Bulus personally and becoming his close friend and admirer presented itself ten years later in 1945. Prior to that time, the only thing I recall about Bulus is that in 1938, he was appointed a teacher at St. Ephraim Seminary in Zahle, Lebanon, a position he took after spending three years as a monk in the monastery.

In 1945, the Patriarch Aphram I Barsoum (d. 1957) ordered the transference of St. Ephraim Seminary from Zahle, Lebanon to Mosul, Iraq. He chose as its principal the dynamic and learned young monk, Bulus Behnam, who presently became instrumental in the religious and cultural awakening of the Syrian Church in Mosul. Forceful, sincere and fully aware of the past glory of the Syrian Church of Antioch and its fathers, Bulus Behnam believed that some literature created for the propagation of the history and culture of his church would be necessary and indeed, indispensable. The idea of this publication was realized through the creation of *al-Mashriq* magazine, born in the spring of 1946. However, the birth of *al-Mashriq* was not without difficulty. It was only one year after the end of World War II, and Behnam found that acquiring paper for the publication of his magazine was truly difficult. The future Metropolitan had to travel to Baghdad in order to receive his rationing of paper, which he finally procured. It was on April 11, 1946 during Lent that the young, erudite monk boarded a third class coach on the train that was to carry him and his rolls of paper to Mosul. This writer had the honor to be his friend and companion on that trip. Since then, these two traveling companions became bound with strong ties of friendship until the untimely and most lamentable death of Behnam in 1969. The archdeacon Ni'mat Allah Denno (d. 1951) was at the station to bid us farewell.

It was a moving sight to see this prominent clergyman wearing his monastic habit and squatting on the floor of a third class train coach with rolls of printing paper carefully piled next to him. As the train left the Baghdad railway station, this writer saw young monk Behnam take something out of a paper bag and spread it on a piece of cloth before him. After which, he invited this writer to join him for a dinner of bread and boiled truffles. The young monk was observing Lent and truffles were the only meal he could bring with him on the journey. Half-way between Baghdad and Mosul, near the city of Takrit, torrents of early spring rain washed out parts of the track making the journey any further impassable. The train was ordered to return to Baghdad.

Behnam with a group of passengers including this writer, decided to go to Takrit where they hoped to find a car to take them to Mosul. No one was as exhilarated and anxious to take advantage of this mishap and visit the city of Takrit as was Rev. Behnam. One could even detect the tears in his eyes at the prospect of gazing on the city that was once the center of Syrian Christianity in Mesopotamia and the seat of the Maphrianate (Prelacy). He

and the group left the small and out-of-the-way railway station to start an hour's journey to Takrit. Behnam hired a donkey to carry his suitcase and valuable rolls of paper while the rest of the group hired donkeys to carry their luggage. When the group reached Takrit, they were unable to find lodging as there were no hotels. So, we sought rest in the sole public *chai khana* (tea house which is most referred to as coffee house by the inhabitants of Iraq). I was sitting next to Rev. Behnam sipping tea in the usual glass cup (called *finjan* or *istikan*), listening to Egyptian crooners on the radio. As we discussed our situation and lack of amenities, behold a man came and stood before Behnam saying, "*Abouna*, (father) Dr. Tuma Kafilmout (the city's physician) invites you to be his guest in his house." We heaved a true sigh of relief, and collecting our luggage, followed the man to the house of Dr. Tuma Kafilmout, the only physician in Takrit. On the morning of April 12, 1946, Rev. Behnam and I sought the help of some men of Takrit to find a car to take us to Mosul, but our efforts were in vain. The heavy downpour continued and the unpaved highway to Mosul was risky to traverse. So, we resigned to fate and stayed in Takrit waiting for a magic opportunity to find a car to transport us to Mosul. It was the evening of the same day that a group of school teachers and others paid us a visit.

Behnam's enthusiasm to visit Takrit was understandable. Takrit, after all, was the heart, indeed, the pride of his Church in the East. Here at Takrit the most exquisite rituals of the Syrian Church were composed. Takrit distinguished itself by developing and possessing a religious rite came to be known as the Rite of Takrit. Takrit also became a seat of the Maphrianate of the East in the sixth century when the original Maphryono, or Catholicos, defected to Nestorianism rejecting the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch, his ecclesiastical superior. During the two days the travel group spent in Takrit, Behnam lost no time visiting the historical sites of the city, especially the ancient Syrian churches. Standing side by side among the ruins of the once Church of St. John, I could see how Behnam was completely distracted by the ruins. He looked as if he was trying to reconstruct the history of this eminent city and relive the past glory of his church. He returned to reality when a teacher from the elementary school of the city, who was our guide, told him that many people of the city affirmed that on many occasions, they saw pillars of light rising from the ruins of St. John Church.

Behnam was so moved by this visit to Takrit that he wrote an article about it entitled "A Night in Takrit," followed by another regarding the history of this city as the center of ancient Syriac Christianity. Both articles appeared in the first issue of his magazine *al-Mashriq*. The first article was preceded by a poem expressing Behnam's nostalgia for the bygone glory of his church.

After visiting the ruins of the Syrian churches, we were invited to lunch by the principal of the elementary school. Later that afternoon, we visited Mahmud al-Thuwayni, a prominent dignitary of Takrit whose house overlooked the Tigris River and looked like a boat floating on the water. Along with us the judge from the local court and several school teachers were also visiting. Many of them were captivated by the historical narrative Rev. Bulus Behnam was presenting about Takrit. Suddenly, Mahmud al-Thuwayni interrupted Rev. Behnam. He stood up, looming like a giant over us since he was such a huge man, and placing his hand over his heart, said, "I bear testimony by Allah that my ancestors are Christians." Deep silence followed his declaration and no one challenged his words. Evidently, his testimony corroborated Rev. Behrman's assertion that until the thirteenth century the majority of the people of Takrit were Syrian Christians.

Shortly afterward we visited the ancient Citadel of Takrit, and continued in our search for a way back to Mosul. However, it seems that the dignitaries of Takrit were so anxious to hear Rev. Behnam that they insisted that we stay for one or two more days. We submitted and thus, it was not until April 14 that we finally found a car and left for Mosul.

Rev. Bulus Behnam (later ordained a bishop in 1952, under the name of Gregorius), was a man of many talents. He was a proficient writer in both Syriac and Arabic, a poet, a scholar and dynamic orator. In the field of Syriac literature, his objective was to present a selection of the literary and philosophical writings of ancient Syrian fathers to his readers. His audience was mainly the Syrian people, having an intrinsic appreciation of their Syriac culture and heritage. Thus, it was Behnam's duty to revive and inculcate them with their heritage. The pages of his bi-monthly magazine *al-Mashriq* (The East) are replete with his various articles on Syriac language and culture. In this endeavor, he may have been motivated by the exhortation of an eleventh-century anonymous Syrian philosopher from Edessa who wrote a unique book entitled *The Cause of all Causes, or A Book for all Nations under Heaven*. His primary objective was to teach people how to seek and find truth. In his introduction,

the author, most likely a rationalist, maintained that reason is virtually truth and knowledge and the center of philosophy. Above all it is the best link between God and man. Proud of the precious knowledge the book contained and the love it inculcated to mankind, he exhorted those who may read his book to translate it and publicize it in many languages in order that it may reach many people and benefit many nations. This was then the motivation of Bishop Bulus Behnam, which he made clear when he said:

> For a time I cherished the idea of carrying this torch, but I was distracted by multiple chores. However, when I read the Introduction of the author of *The Cause of all Causes*, I determined to translate it as well as other books into Arabic to prove the greatness of the graceful Syriac legacy which I have the honor to be one of its faithful servants [(1) See "Min Uyun al-Adab al-Suryaniyya (Masterpieces of Syriac Literature), *al-Mashriq* (Mosul, June, 1946), 1: 25.]

He then goes on to analyze the main ideas of the author. One concept which astonished him was that of "Superman," which no ancient Syrian writer had since tackled and no modern writer detected. Immediately, this term reminded him of Nietzche's Superman and will to power. But the Superman of the Syrian writer, says Behnam, is different from that of the German philosopher. His superiority does not derive from power or attainment of it; his superiority is simply manifested in perfection. Behnam goes on to compare the concept of the Syrian philosopher with that of Nietzche, which is unprecedented in Syriac writings.

Behnam follows with a significant subject on Syriac Culture. He says that he began writing it two years prior (1944) and published parts of it in several periodicals and newspapers of Syria and Lebanon. Under this topic, he discusses Syriac culture in particular; the sources of Syriac culture; the Syriac language, its ancient dialects and the present day Eastern and Western dialects; the consequences of Syriac culture; and the prominent Syriac writers and literary contemplations in the contributions of Syriac culture. His main intention was to convey that the Syrian people in pre-Christian times had a thriving culture which greatly impacted the surrounding nations of the Middle East. It was not until the Arab invasion of the countries of the Middle East that the dominant Syriac language began to recede and be replaced by Arabic. Indeed, the language of Palestine in the time of Jesus Christ was not Hebrew but Aramaic (Syriac). He maintains that many Syriac terms remain until this day in the Arabic language. Also, many Greek terms found their way into Arabic via the Syriac language. However, vicissitudes of time, warfare and persecution caused the decline of Syriac culture, and as a result, only a few villages in Iraq and Syria still speak Syriac. He also discusses the different schools established by both Eastern and Syrian people and their impact on the culture of the Middle East. Unfortunately, Behnam left this significant subject unfinished.

In 1946, the young monk Bulus Behnam published his book with a rather florid Arabic title of *al-Banafsaja al-Dhakiyya fi Khlasat al-Ta'alim al-Masihiyya li al-A'ilat wa al-Madaris al-Orthodoxiyya* (The Fragrant Violet: Concise Christian Teachings for the Use of the Orthodox Families and Schools (Mosul, 1946)). He was gracious to autograph a copy for me while I was still practicing law in the courts of Mosul. For its spiritual significance to the Syrian Orthodox Church and schools, I translated it into English under the title *Concise Teachings of Christianity for Orthodox Families and Schools* (Beth Antioch Press and Gorgias Press, 2013). Metropolitan Mor Cyril Aphram Karim of the Eastern Part of the United States appreciated this book and told me personally that it would be used for teaching in Sunday school. Indeed, it is the first of its kind to meet the needs of the Syrian Orthodox community in the United States and other countries, which have been in dire need of resources for religious instruction.

Behnam's *Khama'il al-Rayhan (The Scrub of Basil)* or *The Orthodoxy of St. Jacob of Saruj (The Doctor of the Church)*, published in 1949, is a refutation of the Papal Syrian priest Ishaq Aramala. Armala maintained that St. Jacob of Saruj (of Roman Catholic faith, or Chalcedonian) was holding to the belief of two natures of Christ, divine and human, separate after the Incarnation. Behnam says in that book that Armala has distorted facts regarding the faith of St. Jacob, and he found it his duty to defend the orthodoxy of St. Jacob, refuting Armala's allegations and placing the true faith of St. Jacob in proper perspective. Armala, apparently, based his claims on St. Jacob's letters to abbots of monasteries and bishops, especially to the monks of the Monastery of St. Basus; the monks of the Monastery of Arzen in Persia; Phula (Paul), Bishop of Edessa; Eutychyana, bishop of Dara; Mara, bishop of Amid; and to the monk Marun, etc. Behnam produces instances where Armala distorted the connotation and language of the letters to support his thesis. He reveals profound knowledge of the Syrian

Church, its theology and the Syriac language deemed necessary for any writer who intends to treat the life and faith of Jacob of Saruj. However, Armala, using his commendable knowledge of the Syriac and Arabic languages, spent his life and effort attacking the Syrian Orthodox Church from which his own church seceded. As far back as 1909, he wrote a book on the Syrian Patriarchate of Antioch entitled *Al-Zahra al-Dhakiyya* (Fragrant Flower) denigrating the Syrian Church, its Orthodox faith and patriarchs. But he was refuted by Patriarch Aphram Barsoum, who was still a monk at the Za'faran Monastery, in a treatise entitled *Kalima Intiqadiyya ala al-Zahra a-Dhakiyya* (1910).

Armala was not the only pretender to knowledge. Behnam went on to deal with another Papal Syrian priest, A. S. Marmarchi, who later joined one of the Latin Orders. Behnam's *Tahqiqat Tarikhiyya wa Lughawiyya fi Haql al-Lughat al-Samiyya* (Historical and Linguistic Verifications in the Field of Semitic Languages), (1953), is a response to Marmarchi's criticism of a treatise by the late Patriarch of Antioch, Aphram Barsoum (d. 1957), entitled "*Al-Alfaz al Suryaniyya fi al-Ma'ajim al-Arabiyya*" (Syriac Terms in the Arabic Dictionaries), published in the magazine of the Arab Academy in Damascus, Vols. 23 and 25.

Marmarchi says most of the words cited are in fact Arabic. Barsoum mentions 759 terms, 352 related to Syriac origin, the rest to Akkadian, Hebrew, Greek and Persian origin. Marmarchi could criticize only 141 correlations, and was ultimately forced to acknowledge their Syriac origin. More than a refutation of Marmarchi, it is a learned study of the Semitic languages, of the relationship of the Syriac (Aramaic) with these languages, and the relationship of Akkadian with the Arabic language. Behnam bases most of his ideas on western writings, and especially relies on Akkadian, German and English Dictionary of William Muss-Arnolt (Berlin, 1905), and R. Campbell Thompson, *A Dictionary of Assyrian Botany* (1949).

Another subject discussed by Behnam is *Ta'qibat Tarikhiyya* (Historical Investigations). In essence, it is a lengthy and profound review of a book on Syriac literature by two Egyptian writers: Murad Kamil and Muhammad Hamdi al-Bakri. It was serialized in the *Muqtataf* periodical in 1949 and then published in book form in the same year. Apparently, the authors, not well versed in Syriac literature, had leaned heavily on Western sources and committed many common errors of Western writers. Behnam's *Ta'qibat* appeared in his *Lisan al-Mashriq*, Vol. 3, 1951. To facilitate his task, he divided his review into several sub-titles and discusses each of them individually. They are as follows: 1- The Aramaic language; 2- The dialects of the Aramaic language; 3- The Aramaic dialects in the Holy Bible; 4-The dialect of Edessa; 5- The Syrians and inventiveness; 6- The Babylonia captivity; 7- The different types of Syriac calligraphy 8- Edessa: its language and conversion to Christianity; 9- The spread of Christianity; 10- Aphrahat the sage; 11- Christianity in India and whether India received it from Adiabene in Mesopotamia; 12- Is the correspondence of King Abgar of Edessa with our Lord (Jesus) unfounded?; 13- The importance of the Syrian writer and poet Bar Daysan (d. 222); 14- The geographical location of Beth Garmai (Bajermi) and whether it was visited by St. Ephraim (d. 373)?; 15- Was Marutha of Miyafarqin a victim of the persecution of the Christians by the Persian King Yazdagird I (399-420)?; 16- Were all the Christians in Arabia at the emergence of Islam (in the seventh century) members of the Nestorian Church; 17- The Syrian Church does not hold the heresy of Eutyches; 18- The name of the city is Berwa and not Beire; 19- The life of Rabula, bishop of Edessa; 20- Preferring Isaac of Antioch to St. Ephraim; 21- Was St. Ephraim a disciple of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus?; 22- Mor Ahudemeh, the universal Metropolitan of the East; 23- Al-Phaph Mountain; and 24- Jacobites and Jacobitism.

These are the points on which the Egyptian authors erred. Unfortunately, this limited space does not allow us to give Behnam's refutation and correction of each of them. They certainly deserve full attention by those writers, especially in the West, of Syriac history and literature who have for a long time received and reiterated these errors without proper investigation.

In the play, *Theodora* (1956), translated into English by Matti Moosa (2007), Bishop Gregorius Behnam places the life of Empress Theodora (590-548), in its proper historical perspective. Theodora, Byzantine Empress, wife of Justinian I, is a controversial figure of the sixth century. Whatever little we know of her early life comes from Greek and Syriac sources which are diametrically opposed. The *Anecdota* is the chief Greek source written by Procopius of Caesarea, a contemporary of Theodora. For no obvious reason, Procopius tried everything to vilify and distort her true character. Procopius is anything but objective, and his account of Theodora should not be taken seriously. Behnam defends her because she is a Miaphysite Orthodox, and because she gave asylum to

many Miaphysites fathers in Constantinople, thus she is the protector of the Orthodox fathers. Behnam opposes Procopius' view that she was a harlot daughter of a bear trainer in Constantinople. He bases his ideas on Syriac sources, especially the Syriac history by a ninth-century anonymous monk of the Monastery of Qartmin (Mor Gabriel). He says that Theodora was the daughter of an Orthodox priest in Mabug near Aleppo. It happened that Justinian, before becoming emperor, was in Syria. He heard of Theodora's virtues and beauty and asked her father for her hand in marriage. The father agreed on condition that he should not force her to accept the Chalcedonian faith of two natures. Justinian agreed and married her.

Behnam's *Peripatetic Philosophy in our Intellectual Legacy* (1958) is a collection of significant articles in which he discusses the development of philosophy according to the Syrians. In a lengthy Chapter, "Al-Siyasa fi al-Falsafa al-Suryaniyya" (Politics in Syrian Philosophy), written in 1951, and published in this book for the first time, Behnam states the most ancient philosopher to discuss worldly politics is Plato in his *Republic*. He maintains, however, that his ideas do not agree with the realities of heavenly religions. Indeed, some of them contradict the fundamental social basis of civilized mankind such as the communalism of wives, children and property. Fortunately, these ideas were nipped in the bud, although some of his followers continued to propagate them. The present author may add that in his *Politica*, Aristotle himself criticized these ideas, especially the communalism of wives and the abolition of property as fatal and impracticable.

In the tenth-century, says Behnam, appeared an anonymous philosopher of Edessan-Syrian origin who wrote a book called *The Cause of All Causes*, already mentioned. But his ideas were more social than political. He discussed the development of cities and the form of their administration in a manner different from that of Plato. His objective was how man should achieve happiness through shortest and safest avenues. He also discussed the generations of people, their physical forms, reasons of building of cities, differences of religions and several other social and political topics.

In this same century, the philosopher Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950) flourished and offered us a true picture of his political ideas in *Ara' Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila* (Ideas of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City). Behnam says that al-Farabi reiterated many of Plato's ideas in a new garb, greatly distant from those of revealed religions. Strangely, he did not mention Plato's radical ideas whether good or bad. Nevertheless, his virtuous city is a utopia which does not exist on this earth. In fact, if such city would ever exist, the earth would become a paradise and the people holy angels. Behnam then moves to discuss his central theme of the writing on politics by the Syrian Maphryono (Prelate) of the East, Mor Gregorius Bar Hebraeus (d.1286).

In his magnificent book *Hewath Hekhemtho* (The Cream of Wisdom), Bar Hebraeus discusses Politics. Behnam maintains that politics is a unique subject peculiar to Bar Hebraeus and only perfunctorily alluded to by other Syrian writers. He explains that Bar Hebraeus' political ideas are not only drawn from Plato, Aristotle and al-Farabi, but also from his own experience in life. He did not slavishly follow their precepts but rather plowed a pragmatic method of his own. While the precepts of the above philosophers were symbolic and theoretical, those of Bar Hebraeus were tangible and practicable.

For instance, Behnam asserts that in the case of al-Farabi, Bar Hebraeus did not copy him, but produced his own ideas about what the ideal city and society should be. He says that to al-Farabi the ideal relationship among men should be through trust, agreement and full pledge to each other voluntarily without taking advantage of them. In other words, al-Farabi meant that just treatment should be the ideal foundation of human relationship. While Bar Hebraeus accepts this and other theories al-Farabi borrowed from Plato, he went a step further maintaining that true love should be the most sublime basis of human relationship. Not that Bar Hebraeus belittles the role of fair treatment as one of the bases of human relationship, but he adroitly compares it to love and prefers love to it. Then, he goes on to discuss the different types of love. He differentiates between positive and selfless love which offers everything to the welfare of mankind, and selfish and egotistic love which yields hatred and evil detrimental to society. In this regard, Bar Hebraeus is motivated by his Christian upbringing and faith.

Behnam continues to say that the importance of Bar Hebraeus' ideal city or state is not utopian as is the case in al-Farabi's virtuous city; it is a real and pragmatic state which, in comparison with modern states, would not be too different. The inhabitants of this city are ordinary people although they differ in their intellectual capabilities and attitudes. They are not some kind of ordinary men turned into angels or who have acquired the qualities of

prophets and supernatural men as is the case in al-Farabi's virtuous city. The only thing which differentiates them from other men is their willingness to live in unity and love, and to use their intellectual traits for the benefit of society. Thus it is possible, as Bar Hebraeus maintains, to establish a state where people live in a happy society free from imprecation and strife. Here, Bar Hebraeus tends to be utopian although not to the same degree as Plato and al-Farabi.

To the best of our knowledge, Bishop Gregorius Bulus Behnam is the first Syrian writer to study thoroughly the treatise of Bar Hebraeus on politics and compare it with al-Farabi's virtuous city. He deserves our admiration for his objective and dispassionate analysis. We hope that scholars will devote more time and effort to this treatise which only constitutes a tiny portion of the writings of Bar Hebraeus, the greatest Syrian intellectual of the thirteenth century.

The remainder of Behnam's *Peripatetic Philosophy* contains four topics, three of which treat the theory of knowledge. They are: The Fountains of Knowledge with Ibn Sina, Ibn Sina in Syriac Literature, Bar Hebraeus' Theory of Knowledge, and Chemistry among Oriental Scientists.

In two articles on Ibn Sina, (Avicenna d. 1037), Behnam shows that he received his knowledge of Aristotle from Syriac translations into Arabic of the Greek philosopher. While he is proud of the contribution of Syriac scholarship to Islamic science, he, at the same time, admits the influence of Muslim learned men like Ibn Sina on Syriac scholarship in the fields of literature and philosophy, and particularly on Bar Hebraeus.

In the field of literature, Behnam says that the learned Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, Yuhanna Bar Ma'dani (d. 1263), translated into Syriac Ibn Sina's philosophical poem *On The Soul*. He also says that Bar Ma'dani translated rather loosely into Syriac verse Ibn Sina's famous story of the Bird. It constituted 150 lines. The story is about the fall of the human soul from its state of holiness, and its many attempts to break its bonds and regain its former state of holiness. The soul is likened unto a wounded bird with broken wings who tries to catch up with other free birds in order to reach the Supreme Being, who permitted its bondage with the belief that he is the only power that can set him and his companion birds free once more.

In his study, Behnam's mainly attempts to compare the ideas of Bar Hebraeus with those of Ibn Sina. In this regard, he resembles the Orientalist A. J. Wensinck who compared the ideas of Bar Hebraeus with those of Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 1111), in his book *Bar Hebraeus' Book of the Dove* (Leiden, 1919). Behnam shows that Bar Hebraeus was not an imitator of al-Ghazzali.

Behnam explains that Bar Hebraeus was no imitator of Ibn Sina, but had produced his own ideas and conclusions independent of him. For example, in his *Treatise on the Soul*, Bar Hebraeus did not solely rely on Ibn Sina but also on former fathers of the Syrian Church, like Moses Bar Kepha (d. 903), who wrote a treatise on *The Immortality of the Soul*. Behnam recognizes that like al-Farabi before them, Ibn Sina and Bar Hebraeus based most of their philosophical studies on the writings of Plato and Aristotle, but with one difference. While Ibn Sina relied on the Arabic translations of the writings of these two great philosophers into writings which were not the best quality, Bar Hebraeus utilized the direct Syriac translations from the Greek. Behnam affirms that the Syriac translations are much better quality that the Arabic translations from the Syriac. Be that as it may, Bar Hebraeus' appreciation of Ibn Sina and his ideas was so great that he translated his book *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (The Book of Indications and Prognostications), at the request of Simon, chief physician of the Mongol Emperor Hulegu, who conquered Baghdad in 1258.

Behnam continues to analyze Bar Hebraeus' *Theory of Knowledge* and compares it with past theories. What he brings to light, however, is Bar Hebraeus' refutation of the philosophers who rejected rational knowledge, especially concerning religion. Some of these philosophers rejected rational knowledge on the premise that there are many religions in this world and also many intellectuals and thinkers. They maintain that if reason was true, thinkers would have agreed on the sources or the particulars of religion. They conclude that since human reason cannot agree on these points, therefore it cannot become a measure for knowledge. Consequently, rational knowledge does not exist.

Behnam goes on to say that Bar Hebraeus refutes such argument by means of religion. He states that human nature perceives true precepts through a particular kind of knowledge which descends from above. This knowledge not only is recognized by Christians, but by many secular philosophers. Bar Hebraeus calls this particular knowledge "enlightenment." The more this enlightenment increases, the more one can depend on rational perception. The causes of this enlightenment are prayer, an ascetic and righteous life. Bar Hebraeus further states that whenever miracles do happen frequently, there truth is more manifest. We know that in Christianity miracles happened and are still happening. Therefore, Christianity is a true religion and the teaching of the fathers is likewise true. Bar Hebraeus concludes that since human reason has the ability to discern this matter, it should logically possess rational knowledge. Consequently, rational knowledge is true knowledge.

Behnam merits our appreciation for his study of Bar Hebraeus, his philosophy and for placing the ideas of this outstanding thirteenth-century Syrian writer in proper perspective, a matter not many scholars have discussed.

Behnam's enchantment with and admiration of Bar Hebraeus were boundless. Concerning scholarship he calls him his master, and for his virtue and saintliness, his paragon. Quite often, Behnam told this writer, who was his close friend and admirer, that he was so fond of Bar Hebraeus that he used to see him in his dreams. He also told this writer that at his ordination as bishop he chose the name of Gregorius, which was the ecclesiastical epithet of Bar Hebraeus.

In 1965, Behnam's book *Ibn al-Ibri al-Sha'ir* (Bar Hebraeus the Poet) was published. Behnam meticulously analyzed the different types of Bar Hebraeus' poetry, especially his exquisite ode on *Divine Wisdom* which he translated into Arabic verse.

The book treats extensively the life of Bar Hebraeus, his episcopate, his contribution to the Syrian Church and the different aspects of his poetry and themes. Behnam bases his study on Bar Hebraeus' *Anthology*. It was published for the first time by the Maronite priest Mikha'il Abd Allah Gabriel Shababi in 1877. It was published the second time by the monk-priest Yuhanna Dolabani (later a bishop) in 1929. In his edition, Dolabani relied on ancient and more correct manuscripts which rendered it superior to that of Shababi. Basically, Behnam used this edition.

Behnam proceeded to classify the poetry of Bar Hebraeus according to the respective themes treated by the composer. They include passionate love, friendly relationship, eulogy, praise, criticism, nature's beauty, human character, the soul, philosophy, mysticism and Christian dogma. Behnam described each of these themes in a few lines and makes an important observation about Syriac poetry. He says that Syriac poets did not use satire; they did not debase or scandalize their opponents but rather expostulated with them. However, they criticized the heretics who deviated from what they considered the Orthodox tenets of Christianity. Behnam's observation reminds us of ancient Arab poets. They never knew satire as we know it today. They knew only *hija'*, meaning defamation, and *madh*, meaning praise. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Syriac poets never knew satire.

Bar Hebraeus, Behnam assays, criticized harshly some pseudo-intellectuals and pretenders to knowledge. He also criticized vehemently some church fathers for their cowardice and negligence of duties. But this criticism is seldom used by Bar Hebraeus.

Behnam, further observes, that mysticism in its true sense, was not treated by Syrian poets until the thirteenth century. During this time, Patriarch Yuhanna Bar Ma'dani (d. 1262), composed poems on perfection, the categories of the perfect, and the union of the soul with God. Bar Hebraeus composed similar poems, one of which is his outstanding poem on *Divine Love*. Like Umar Khayyam (d. 1123-4), he used wine to typify love and desired to drink it with abundance. He describes this wine as being so ancient that it preceded time and days and nights. This wine was indescribable. It was never contained in earthenware because the quality of the potter and the earthenware were so inferior to its superior quality. Like other mystics, Bar Hebraeus considers the outcome of drinking this wine as unity with God.

Behnam further observes that Ma'dani and Bar Hebraeus were the first to treat philosophy and mysticism in their poetry. The greatest example is Bar Hebraeus' poem in which he treated Socrates' adage, "Law is good but philosophy is better." Bar Hebraeus opens his poem with a description of law and philosophy and draws a

comparison between them. He then reaches a conclusion incompatible with Socrates, preferring law to philosophy. Bar Hebraeus bases his conclusion on the fact that while law is available to many people, philosophy is only attainable by a few, namely philosophers. Furthermore, Bar Hebraeus reasons that philosophy is sufficient to lead people to perfection, yet its path is hard to traverse and its acquisition and comprehension are beyond the intelligence of common people. Law on the other hand, is easy to acquire and is within the comprehension of ordinary people as well as those who do not possess a high degree of learning.

Bar Hebraeus was the first Syrian to devote several poems to the human soul. Behnam observes that Bar Hebraeus, in his poetry, did not study the soul or analyze it philosophically, but used it as an aesthetic theme. He admired its charm, beauty and spirituality and other similar qualities. In one of his poems, Bar Hebraeus calls the soul a dove striving to free itself from the state of materialism and becomes one with God. He exhorts the soul to fight the body and its lusts in order to free itself from its physical cage and fly to the highest heaven. He reminds the soul of the beauty of knowledge and sound thinking, which should be its greatest joy in this life. Only by attaining these goals, will she be able to look forward to the realm of the spirit.

Bar Hebraeus' *Anthology* also contains a few poems which Behnam translated into Arabic. Most exquisite is his poem which describes roses and the month of April. A great part of this poem is couched in the form of a dialogue between Bar Hebraeus and roses. In other poems, Bar Hebraeus describes a candle and a hand fan. He says that fan is not only a material object, but a companion which renders comfort and joy to those who use it.

Behnam's consummate knowledge of Syriac and Arabic poetry, and his artistic taste and talent, are demonstrated in his translation into Arabic verse of Bar Hebraeus' poem on *Divine Wisdom*. He devoted a great part of his book *Bar Hebraeus the Poet*, to this poem. He affixed the Syriac text of the poem and its translation on the opposite page. The poem and its translation cover pp. 70-113 of the book. It is appended by copious footnotes explaining the meaning of difficult terms.

Behnam states that Bar Hebraeus had been in love with wisdom since his youth. Although he composed several poems on wisdom, his *Divine Wisdom* is the greatest of them all. He describes it as "Bar Hebraeus' greatest epic; indeed the only epic in Syriac literature." Behnam explains the reason he translated this poem into Arabic was because that to the Syrian, this unique epic is comparable to the famous pre-Islamic *Mu'allaqat*, which Arabs so veneered that they suspended them on the walls of the Ka'ba. Yet he laments the fact that in later generations the Syrians knew nothing about it because "our educated young men and women have lost the language of their ancestors." Furthermore, no learned man was interested in translating it into Arabic save Butrus al-Bustani (d. 1883). But al-Bustani, says Behnam, translated only a few lines of this poem. He could not finish it because of the linguistic, philological and metrical problems he encountered. Behnam affirms that it is very difficult to confine the Syriac verse, no matter how efficient the versifier is, to a few lines of Arabic verse. Furthermore, al-Bustani deviated a great deal from the original Syriac. For these reasons, Behnam undertook the translation of the entire poem in less than twenty days with footnotes "while preserving its original meaning." Those who read Behnam's translation realize that he is master of both Syriac and Arabic knowledge combined with poetical aesthetic taste.

Behnam's translation of Bar Hebraeus' *Ethikon* (Book of Ethics) is a further demonstration of his erudition and scholarly proficiency. The endeavor was not only a mere translation of the *Ethikon*. His expansive Introduction to the book of ninety-five pages, covers the multiple aspects of the book beginning with the available manuscripts to the influence of its precursor, *The Book of Hierotheos*, on Eastern mysticism. After relating the known sources of the book, Behnam says that he used the version published by the erudite Rev. Paul Bedjan in 1898 based on five copies.

After a brief discussion of the *Ethikon*, Behnam proceeds to discuss at length the origin of mysticism in the East and gives a summary of *The Book of Hierotheos*. He also provides a summary of Bar Hebraeus' introduction to this significant book. Then, he moves to discuss Syriac mysticism writings which contain a genuine contribution to the field of mysticism. Behnam goes on to analyze *The Book of Hierotheos* together with the philosophy of Stephen Bar Sudayli to whom the book is attributed. He cites the opinion of the Syrian Patriarch Theodosius (d. 896), who wrote a detailed commentary on *The Book of Hierotheos*. The commentary of Theodosius, Behnam assays, is an indication that the mystical ideas of this book were probably known to Syrian learned men since the sixth century. They admired its teachings although some of them were contrary to Christian teachings. Behnam does not seem to mention the translation of *Stephen Bar Sudaili the Syrian Mystic and The Book of Hierotheos* by A. L. Forthingham (Leiden, 1886).

Further in his Introduction to the *Ethikon*, Behnam gives a detailed analysis of Bar Hebraeus' mysticism. He compares this book with Bar Hebraeus' *The Book of the Dove* which contains aspects of his spiritual life since youth. He touches upon the great Muslim mystic Abu Hamid al-Ghazzai (d. 1111) in his *al-Munqidh min al-Dhalal* (The Rescuer from Error), saying that Bar Hebraeus must have gone through the same spiritual crises that beset al-Ghazzali. I brought to his attention that he should consult the excellent book of the Orientalist A. J. Wensinck entitled *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove, together with some Chapters of the Ethikon* (Leiden, 1919). This book contains Wensinck's translation of Bar Hebraeus' *Book of the Dove* together with several chapters of the *Ethikon* related to it, and a very detailed Introduction in which Wensinck compares Bar Hebreaus to Ghazzali and shows the influence of the latter on the former. Here I should state for the sake of history that Bishop Behnam sent me his Introduction to the *Ethikon* to read. After making some observations, I wrote back that he should consult Wensinck's book because it would be indispensable for his Introduction. He then wrote asking me to send him a copy of Wensinck's book immediately. I sent him a copy of the book but it did not get to him. He wrote back that he did not receive the copy, which he assumed was lost in the mail and that had no choice but to proceed with his translation of the *Ethikon* and Introduction without it. He was at that time in Jerusalem taking care of the Syrian diocese of the city. Years later, I understood from a student at the Seminary in Damascus, that a monk whose name he did not disclose who handled the patriarchate's mail, did not deliver it to Bishop Behnam. The student said that, much to the admiration of the seminarians, the monk, who taught Bar Hebreaus at the seminary, continuously referred to Wensinck's book. The students were surprised that the monk knew so much about Wensinck while he could hardly read English. Be that as it may, Bishop Behnam assumed that the copy was lost and continued writing his Introduction to the *Ethikon* without it.

Behnam makes a different contribution to this subject by analyzing the relationship between Hierotheos, Ibn Sina and Bar Hebraeus. He discovered that the principle of the mystic philosophy of Ibn Sina has a striking resemblance to those of Hierotheos. He reasons that since Bar Hebraeus knew *The Book of Hierotheos*, revised it and wrote an Introduction to it, and since he was influenced by the teaching of Ibn Sina, it is no wonder that these three philosophers, Hierotheos, Ibn Sina and Bar Hebraeus, should have a great deal in common with one another, especially mystical precepts. Behnam, however, does not explain how Ibn Sina was influenced by Hierotheos, or that he even read Hierotheos. We know that *The Book of Hierotheos* survived only in Syriac, and there is no evidence that Ibn Sina knew Syriac. Nevertheless, Behnam states that Hierotheos' mystical ideas were translated into Arabic at the beginning of the ninth century A.D., and spread among the Eastern mystics. Ibn Sina and other Muslim philosophers probably had read this translation and were influenced by its contents. As evidence of this influence, Behnam assays that if we compare the mystical ideas of Hierotheos, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazzali, we will find great harmony between them covering most of the mystical precepts they discussed. Behnam, not only bases his ideas on Bar Hebraeus' prose writings but also on his *Ode on Perfection* which he composed in Baghdad in 1277. In this context, we should admit that Behnam has an advantage over some other scholars by having access to Syriac poetry. Behnam, then, goes on to discuss the topics shared by these three philosophers, especially the Perfect and Perfection, the categories of the Perfect, and their strife to achieve the highest degree of Perfection, the ascent of the mind and the ultimate unity of the soul with God.

Since 1961, Behnam had been working on a Syriac encyclopedia which he called *Encyclopedia Orientalis*. He wrote asking me to provide him with necessary information. I wrote back that the composition of an encyclopedia of this nature is a life-long project and that it requires a team of scholars rather than one individual.

I reminded him of the similar endeavor of the eminent Lebanese writer Butrus al-Bustani. He attempted to compose an encyclopedia but could not write more than few volumes and then then gave up the work. Even the volumes he achieved were inadequate and incomplete. Behnam, however, was determined to go ahead with the project. He wrote to me that, "God will help the weak man." In another letter, he said that he would soon send me the first hundred pages of the encyclopedia which he had written in English for my scrutiny. But late in 1963, he wrote again that he had temporarily stopped working on the encyclopedia in favor of more pressing subjects. He never continued the project. Fortunately, a copy of the pages of this encyclopedia he forwarded to me are in my possession. They constitute 113 pages of foolscap size and are neatly bound. They open with the Syriac letter A and end with Ahrun (Aaron), a thirteenth-century bishop of Laqbin. The pages contain more than three hundred entries including short biographies of prominent Syriac patriarchs, maphryone (prelates), bishops, writers and poets. They also contain short or long descriptions of towns, villages, churches, monasteries and famous historical sites in the Middle East. His major concern was his own Syrian Orthodox Church. But he did not neglect to record the important events of other Syrian churches like the Nestorian, Maronite and the Syrian Catholic churches.

In the same year (1963), Bishop Behnam published the Syriac text and Arabic translation of *The History of Tur Abdin* by Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum (d. 1957). It was translated into English by this author (Matti Moosa) and published by Gorgias Press, 2008.

In 1966, Bishop Behnam was engaged in writing two projects: one about the *Assyrian Sage Ahiqar*, under the topic of *al-Hikma fi Wadi al-Rafidayn* (Mesopotamian Wisdom); the other was on the history of the Syrian Church and the Crusades. Let me begin first with the second project. I recall that I wrote to him proposing that both of us should collaborate on writing about the Crusades based on Syriac sources. He replied saying that this is a very important subject, and even provided a breakdown of the major topics which should be treated. But I never heard from him further about the subject and gathered that he was busy with other endeavors. Years after his death in 1969, I spent five years tackling the subject of the Crusades individually. It resulted in a massive book which was published by Gorgias Press in 2008 (*Crusades: Conflict between Christendom and Islam*).

As to the subject of Ahiqar, he had already written a lengthy article about him in *Lisan al-Mashriq*, Vol. 4, January-February, 1952. He dropped it for a time and then returned to it. The reason was that he was consulting and studying different sources and continued writing. I recall that toward the end of 1965, he wrote to me that he had already finished writing about Ahiqar. He also said that he had copied more than half of the manuscript on the typewriter and was intending to prepare it soon for publication. Then he submitted it to the Academy of the Syriac Language in Baghdad. But it was not published until 1976, seven years after the author's death.

In the Introduction, the Academy of the Syriac Language states that the copy of the manuscript which reached them constituted 180 pages written on the typewriter. They believe that the original manuscript contained forty more pages than what they received. They had no idea who excised it from the manuscript. They speculated that the author probably cut these pages which he deemed superfluous. Be that as it may, the Academy affirms that the manuscript they received carried the following title: *Ahiqar al-Hakim: Alaqatuhu bi Hukama' Sumer wa Akkad wa Ashur wa Atharuh fi al-Usur al-Taliya wa Buhuth for al-Lugha al-Aramiyya al-Qadima wa Alaqatuha bi al-Lugha al-Arabiyya* (Ahiqar the Sage: His Relations with the Sages of Sumeria, Akkadia and Ashor and his Vestiges in the Wisdom of the Following Generations, and Themes on the Ancient Aramaic Language and its Association with the Arabic Language.). The Academy says because it could not obtain the first section of the book and after dropping the last section, they found it satisfactory to title it *Ahiqar al-Hakim*. (Ahiqar the Sage).

In 1906-1907, the German archeological expedition uncovered the story of Ahiqar among other papyri written in Aramaic of 500 B.C. in Elephantine in Egypt. The story of Ahiqar was published and studied by the German Orientalist Eduard Sachau (d. 1930). Since then, Orientalists began to study the language and subject matter of this Aramaic text, its date and importance to world culture. Behnam lists no less than fifteen Western specialists and one Lebanese specialist (Anis Fraiha) who were involved in this study. In brief, Ahiqar was a Vizier of the two Assyrian Kings, Sennacherib 705-681 B.C. and his son Esarhaddon 681-669 B.C., both of whom are mentioned in 2 Kings 19:37. Ahiqar was a distinguished sage and counselor of kings. He had no son even though he married sixty wives. Finally, he adopted his nephew Nadan and raised him in his wisdom. But Nadan grew into a wicked man and betrayed his master. The story contains instructions meant to edify Nadan and teach

him how to treat people and how to face the world. Behnam included in his study the version of the story which was published and studied by Eduard Sachau, and the Syriac version of the story of Ahiqar published by Mor Philoxenus Yuhanna Dolabani, Syrian Orthodox metropolitan of Mardin in 1962 in Jerusalem, after Syriac MS Cambridge 2020. Some Western Orientalists have shown that parts of the story of Ahiqar have similarity with apocryphal and canonical books of the Old Testament. Behnam remarks that the wisdom of the Assyrian Ahiqar was not a unique and isolated proposition. It was preceded by Assyrian and Babylonian wisdom tales. Until recently, a great number of Orientalists have maintained that the Greek philosophy is unique, and is the beginning of world knowledge from which other cultures are derived. This is not totally correct. Both Ahiqar and Greek philosophy are a continuation of ever-developing former world cultures. Behnam maintains that the story of Ahiqar was born in Mesopotamia and it preceded the Greek system of philosophy. He also maintains that the Mesopotamian philosophy is not a novelty in the history of mankind but must have been preceded by other philosophies not known to us.

Behnam produced Sachau's version of the story of Ahiqar and the Syriac copy published by Mor Philoxenus Yuhanna Dolabani. He translated both versions into Arabic with comments. After comparing the two versions he discovered that the Syriac version is more comprehensive than the Aramaic version of Sachau, of which some folios are lost. He also showed the points of difference and agreement between the two versions. He further produced several terms in the Aramaic text which Orientalists have misread or misinterpreted. The essential conclusion of his study is that the Aramaic language of the story of Ahiqar is one and the same Syriac language of Edessa and which we use until this day. Of course, Bishop Behnam realizes that, like other languages, Aramaic was inevitably subject to some changes. But, he insists, and with mastership of the language, that the Aramaic of the story of Ahiqar is Syriac and nothing else. Just compare it with the language of the Syriac vulgate version of the Bible called the Pshitto to see that they are identical. His conclusion is decisive and challenges the Orientalist linguists who maintain that the Syriac language is a dialect of Aramaic.

Another essential topic Bishop Behnam tackled is the treatment of Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria (444-454 A.D.) by the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). His book is entitled *al-Papa Dioscorus al-Iskandari Hami al-Iman* (Dioscorus Pope of Alexandria: Protector of the Faith) was published in 1968, and reprinted in 1976 by The Coptic Bishopric of Culture, History and Learning in Egypt in 1976. The subject is not only historical but theological. It involves the dogmatic and theological controversies of the fifth century concerning the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine, and the manner of their existence in tandem. Unlike all human beings, Jesus is divine, the Son of God who eternally existed with the Father. But he is also a man taking a body from a woman, the Virgin Mary, with all the human characteristics except sin. Once the two natures of Christ are united in his Incarnation, they cannot be separated from each other. They are one united in one person with one act and one will. Moreover, if Mary gave birth to the God Christ, she is rightfully Theotokos or Mother or Bearer of God. Nestorius, who was a Patriarch of Constantinople in 428 A.D., would not accept this dogma. He separated the two natures of Christ and taught that Mary could not bear or give birth to the God Christ. She only bore Christ as a man and then he became divine later at his baptism. He preferred to call Mary Christotokos (Mother of Christ), meaning that she gave birth to a man and not God. Indeed, in a sermon, Nestorius' priest Anastasius, said that he could not call a child his Lord, thus rejecting the term of Theotokos. Thus, a controversy ensued between Nestorius and Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (d. 444) over this belief. Cyril, basing his argument on the Gospel of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh," maintained the God (Christ) who became flesh is not distinct nature but "One incarnate nature of the divine Logos." The controversy became so troubling to the church that Emperor Theodosius II (408-450 A.D.) called a council to settle this controversy. The Council met in Ephesus in 431 A.D., presided by St. Cyril, and condemned Nestorius.

Soon, however, the church was rocked by another controversy caused by the old man Eutyches, an archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople. While trying to defend Cyril's belief of "One nature of the divine Logos" Eutyches fell into heresy. He rejected the truth of the body derived from the Virgin which the Word (Christ) took from her. He taught that the Word became flesh as the atmosphere assumes bodily form and becomes rain or snow under the influence of the wind or as water by reason of the cold air becomes ice. In other words, Eutyches maintained that the divine nature of Christ absorbed the human nature. In 448 A.D., Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, convened a local council to discuss the case of Eutyches. Eutyches was condemned for being a heretic. He complained to church leaders at that time among whom was Leo, bishop of Rome. At the beginning,

Leo understood that Eutyches' teaching was not heretical. But when he contemplated his teaching further, he discovered that he was indeed heretical. Meantime, to combat the heresy of Eutyches, Emperor Theodosius II issued a royal decree for a council to meet in Ephesus which came to be known as Second Ephesus. The council met in 449 A.D. under the presidency of Pope Dioscorus, who succeeded Cyril in 444 A.D. The fact that the presidents of the two Councils of First and Second Ephesus were Egyptians, indicates the supremacy of the Egyptian church and Episcopate in theological matters. Bishop Leo of Rome sent a letter, commonly known as the Tome, to the Second Council of Ephesus. He made it clear through his representatives that it should be used as the criterion for determining the case of Eutyches. Upon receiving the letter the council did not read it. Apparently, John, Secretary of Council, kept it among other documents to be read when the right time came for reading it. However, it is believed that it was not read because it contained expressions considered Nestorian in nature and were condemned by the First Council of Ephesus. Thus, if it was read, it would create unnecessary commotion and dissension specially that the council was determined to solve, in addition of Eutyches' case, the case of several church dignitaries of Nestorian proclivity. Eutyches was summoned to the Council and presented his faith in writing which demonstrated that he stood on the dogmatic faith of the Council of Nicaea and the First Council of Ephesus. Thus, he was declared as Orthodox emperor and the Council's decision was presented to the Emperor Theodosius who endorsed it. Seeing that Leo's letter was not read, and that he was not recognized as "the religious leader of the entire Christian Church", Leo's representatives left the council and spread the false report that they were attacked and harmed by members of the council, and that even Flavian of Constantinople died having been trampled. When their report reached Leo, he felt humiliated and branded the council unjustly as "The Robbers Council." In 450 A.D., Theodosius died without issue and the throne passed to his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian, an army general. Pulcheria and her husband were staunch supporters of Leo, bishop of Rome. Using their friendship and support, Leo requested them to convene another council to annul the decisons of the Second Council of Ephesus which had humiliated him and his position by not reading his Tome. A council was convened by the two rulers at Chalcedon and thus was known as the Council of Chalcedon. The Council was basically made up of prominent bishops who were either Nestorians, like Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, or pro-Nestorian. Obviously, they were supporters of Leo of Rome. Ostensibly, their main business was to redefine the faith which was already set by the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus; it needed no further definition. But their action reveals that they were bent on punishing and humiliating Dioscorus.

The purpose of giving this summary of events which preceded Chalcedon, is to prepare the way for the treatment of Dioscorus by Behnam. It is not intended to support or denounce the faith of Chalcedon. Such theological controversies have little impact in our time. They are only understood by a handful of systematic theologians. The whole point of Behnam's book is to show that from the outset the Council of Chalcedon treated Dioscorus as a culprit and condemned him not for his faith, as shown below.

Bishop Behnam further says that the Council of Chalcedon accused Dioscorus of embracing the belief of Eutyches, but could not prove it. In fact, he condemned Eutyches and held the same belief of Cyril of "One nature of the divine Logos." When the council tried to force him to reject this formula of faith and sign their own formula which holds "Two natures united in one person yet still separate after the Incarnation," Dioscorus responded saying, "If my hand is cut off and my blood run over the parchment, I will not sign."

Bishop Behnam continues that the council further accused Dioscorus of using violence especially against the representatives of Leo of Rome, Flavian of Constantinople and others. But this accusation proved groundless. As to the accusation that Dioscorus overlooked the reading of the Tome of Leo of Rome at the second Council of Ephesus, Bishop Behnam maintains that the accusation is untenable. He affirms that Dioscorus received the Tome with great reverence and twice ordered that it should be read mentioning Leo with due reverence as "the lover of Christ the chief priest of Rome." Bishop Behnam reasons that the problem, however, is that the Tome was not a doctrinal document in the full sense of the word. The greatest problem, however, is that it contained "Nestorian" expressions such that each of the natures of Christ operated according to its characteristic whether divine or human. In his Tome, Leo said that the divine nature acts divinely and the human nature acts as a human. This gives the impression that there are two separate Christs: one divine, the other human and there is no union between the two. Such expressions, maintains Bishop Behnam, must have caused the apprehensive members of Second Ephesus to delay its reading. Behnam asserts that when Dioscorus ordered that Leo's Tome

be read, the chief notary said there were still several royal decrees to be dealt with first. Thus, and unintentionally, the Tome was not read.

Whatever the case may be, the Council of Chalcedon deliberately mishandled Dioscorus. From the outset, the members were determined to punish him. And when he appeared at the council, he was made to stand where the culprits usually stand. Seeing that he was treated as a culprit, Dioscorus refused to attend the council. The entire case of Dioscorus was evidence of a blatant abortion of justice. It was a farce which revealed itself in the verdict pronounced against Dioscorus: He was condemned not for his faith, but because he was summoned three times and did not respond.

The above account of the writings of Bishops Bulus Behnam is incomplete. He penned many other subjects which this writer did not discuss. He only concentrated on his major themes. Considering the short life of this erudite man, his literary output is highly impressive. He is truly a shining star in the firmament of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century. As successive generations still remember with admiration the erudition of the thirteenth-century Maphryono (Prelate) Mor Gregorius Bar Hebraeus, future generations shall also remember and appreciate the works of this twentieth-century luminary Bishop Mor Gregorius Bulus Behnam.

For more sources on the life and work of Bishop Gregorius Bulus Behnam, see:

1 Rev. Yusuf Sai'd, *al-Malphan Hayat Mar Gregorius Bulus Behnam, Metran of Baghdad and Basra* (Beirut, 1969).

2 Metropolitan Ishaq Saka, *Sawt Ninawa wa Aram: aw al-Metran Bulus Behnam* (Damascus: Dar al-Ruha, 1988).

Selected Writings of Matti Moosa Menu